

Book Reviews

Normal: Transsexual CEOs, Cross-Dressing Cops, and Hermaphrodites With Attitude. By Amy Bloom. Random House, New York, 2002, 140 pp., \$23.95.

Reviewed by Anne A. Lawrence, M.D., Ph.D.¹

Writer and psychotherapist Amy Bloom is best known for her short stories, which display her gifts for detailed observation and psychological insight. *Normal* is Bloom's first book of nonfiction. It contains three essays examining the lives of persons who are usually regarded as anything but normal: female-to-male (FtM) transsexuals, heterosexual crossdressers, and intersexed persons. The essays are bracketed by a preface and an afterword that criticize conventional concepts of normality and suggest that understanding these unusual individuals can inform and expand our ideas about what is genuinely normal.

The centerpiece of Bloom's book, literally and figuratively, is "Conservative Men in Conservative Dresses," which deals with heterosexual crossdressers. A shorter version of this essay appeared in the *Atlantic Monthly* in April, 2002, and anyone who read and enjoyed it there will not want to miss this significantly expanded edition. Bloom accompanies two dozen crossdressing men, their female partners, and one male-to-female transsexual on the Dignity Cruise to Catalina Island, and observes participants at the Fall Harvest 2000 gender convention in St. Louis. She also interviews Jane Ellen and Mary Francis Fairfax, the guiding spirits behind the crossdresser organization Tri-Ess, and solicits the contrasting views of psychologist Ray Blanchard, the *bête noire* of many transgendered persons, due to his willingness to discuss the erotic aspects of their behavior.

Although the crossdressers Bloom meets invariably claim that their "hobby" is about relaxation and expressing their feminine side, Bloom is skeptical of these explanations. Her observations lead her to conclude that crossdressing is primarily an erotic fetish, the expression of which sometimes taxes even her capacity for tolerance and empathy:

Crossdressers wear their fetish, and the gleam in their eyes, however muted by time or habit, the unmistakable presence of a lust being satisfied or a desire being fulfilled

in that moment, in your presence, even *by* your presence, is unnerving. The mix of the crossdressers' own arousal and anxiety and our responsive anxiety and discomfort is more than most of us can bear. (pp. 94–95)

Bloom devotes considerable attention to the wives and female partners of crossdressing men. She observes that, with some notable exceptions, their circumstances are not happy, and she wonders aloud how the feminism many crossdressers espouse could permit them to inflict their erotic compulsion on their partners. In the end, Bloom finds little genuine femininity in the crossdressers she meets:

For these men, the woman within is entirely the Maybelline version, not the Mother Teresa version, not the Liv Ullmann version, and not even the Tracy Ullman version. There is no innate grasp of female friendship, of the female insistence on relatedness, of the female tradition of support and accommodation for one's partner and of giving precedence to the relationship overall. (p. 95)

Although the tone of these excerpts may seem grim, the essay generally is not. Bloom's descriptions of events on the Dignity Cruise and at Fall Harvest are alive with fascinating detail, and her keen eye for the ironic and the absurd is revealed in many humorous anecdotes. Blanchard's comments provide a witty counterpoint to the author's observations. If a more insightful or more entertaining treatment of heterosexual crossdressing has been published, this reviewer has not seen it. "Conservative Men" is essential reading for anyone interested in transgender phenomena, and is itself worth the price of the book.

Bloom's two other essays do not succeed quite so well. The first of these, "The Body Lies," deals with FtM transsexuals. It was originally published in the *New Yorker* in 1994, and has been updated very little for this volume. Bloom interviews half a dozen FtM transsexuals, some well known (e.g., writer Jamison Green and photographer Loren Cameron), most not. A few family members and female partners of FtMs also contribute their perspectives, as do several professionals who work with transsexuals, including Ira Pauly, Don Laub, Friedemann Pfäfflin, and Peggy Cohen-Kettenis. Laub, a surgeon who performs sex reassignment operations, is a particular focus of Bloom's attention. She portrays him as a sensitive and conscientious clinician who nevertheless remains slightly out of touch with the feelings and needs of his FtM patients. Bloom's descriptions of her informants are masterpieces

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of subtle detail, and her interview excerpts are sometimes touching and occasionally hilarious.

Bloom concludes that FtM transsexuals are genuinely men; the bodies they were born with lie about their real identities. She confidently asserts, "I like these men, and I know, whatever 'knowing' means, that they're men" (p. 15). She even compares her transsexual informants to Gregor Samsa in Kafka's *Metamorphosis*, in an elegant if not entirely convincing update of the "trapped in the wrong body" cliché. But if the body lies, Bloom is less clear about what tells the truth; her concept of masculinity remains highly intuitive. Like Justice Stewart on pornography, Bloom can't define what it means to be a man, but she knows one when she sees one. She knows that Green is a man because he can effortlessly turn down the headlights of her rental car when she cannot, and because he refuses to make any apologies before consuming a large plate of food. With observations like these, Bloom walks the line between acknowledging meaningful sex differences and enshrining cultural stereotypes. In some cases, however, bodies seem to speak the truth to Bloom. Examining childhood photos of Lyle, another FtM informant, she observes that he appears "sturdy" and "cocky," and confidently concludes, "this is a little boy" (p. 11). The body lies, except when it doesn't.

The final essay, "Hermaphrodites with Attitude," concerns intersexed persons. It is the shortest and least satisfying of the three, and one suspects that Bloom wrote it quickly, to round out her slim volume. The title is apt. "Hermaphrodites with Attitude" was the original name of the newsletter of the Intersex Society of North America (ISNA), the militant advocacy group that opposes most genital surgery performed on intersex infants. Bloom's discussion of this topic is so one-sided that her essay could almost be mistaken for an ISNA publication.

In her other essays, Bloom refuses to uncritically accept her informants' explanations, and insists on reaching her own conclusions, in part by soliciting contrasting views; but there is little evidence of that process here. Instead, she appears to have confined her inquiries almost exclusively to ISNA members and their academic allies, especially Alice Dreger, Anne Fausto-Sterling, and Suzanne Kessler, who in Bloom's opinion are responsible for "all the best writings on the intersexed" (p. 119). The only contrasting opinions Bloom can find come from a 1990 videotape by the American College of Surgeons.

Although readers are introduced to a few intersexed persons, all are ISNA stalwarts. Bloom's portrait of Cheryl Chase, ISNA's charismatic founder, is detailed yet oddly superficial; we meet Chase the tireless activist, but never get a glimpse of the emotions that fuel her activism. And in contrast to the other essays, we learn almost nothing about

the issues of the partners and family members of intersexed persons. Chase's partner, Robin Mathias, appears briefly but never discusses her relationship with Chase.

In "Hermaphrodites," Bloom misses an opportunity to critically examine the current controversy surrounding the treatment of intersex infants. By some estimates, roughly 2000 such infants have undergone surgery for ambiguous genitalia every year in the United States for the past several decades. Yet ISNA, despite considerable national publicity, has attracted only a few hundred members who identify as intersexed, some of whom probably are not genuinely so. Are ISNA's intersexed members representative of intersexed persons generally, simply the "tip of the iceberg" in a population long silenced by secrecy and shame? Or are they a tiny and unrepresentative minority of intersexed persons, albeit a very media-savvy minority? Are all "cosmetic" genitoplasties in infants with ambiguous genitalia inherently flawed operations, with unacceptably high rates of complications? Or are there some reasonably good operations, with acceptably low rates of complications? Unfortunately, Bloom never explores these questions substantively. Even readers who agree with ISNA's positions (and this reviewer agrees with many of them) may wish Bloom had dug a bit deeper.

The book's afterword, "On Nature," attempts to tie the three essays together by suggesting that the persons discussed therein do not represent Nature's mistakes, merely Nature's range. Like the platypus and the black tulip, Bloom writes, crossdressers, transsexuals, and intersexed persons may be unusual, but they are not abnormal. However, many readers may find this a dubious proposition in light of the evidence Bloom has presented earlier. Is it normal that crossdressers experience "a sexual impulse that is directed toward an object or an act and that is greater than the desire for any person"? (p. 94). And if so, why does Bloom herself find this so unnerving? Is it normal to experience one's own body as a Gregor Samsa might? Many transsexuals would probably say no. Bloom could have spared her readers this last-minute didacticism and trusted them to reach their own conclusions.

The Desirable Body: Cultural Fetishism and the Erotics of Consumption. By Jon Stratton. University of Illinois Press, Urbana, Illinois, 1996, 250 pp., \$16.95.

Reviewed by Lindsey Bocchieri, M.A., and Marta Meana, Ph.D.²

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Western society is characterized as a culture of consumption. Regardless of the commodity—food, clothes, automobiles, electronics, cosmetics, a “lifestyle,” or an “image”—the media insists that we are less than adequate without the promise of their product. As this societal emphasis on consumption continues to expand, the cultural ideals for the desirable female (and, in recent years, male) body have become increasingly slenderized, eroticized, and, as this text forcefully posits, fetishized. In this volume, Stratton takes the reader through a historical journey of the modern experience of the body and the simultaneous growth of consumption, both argued to be indelibly linked consequences of mass market capitalism. Like most cultural theorists, Stratton borrows liberally and somewhat selectively from the social sciences, humanities, and art to develop an argument constructed on a surprisingly literal acceptance of Freudian and Lacanian views of sexuality, as well as Marxist economic theory. Essentially, his thesis holds that the current eroticization of the body amounts to a cultural fetishism born of the male’s phallogocentric inadequacy relative to the power of the modern state.

In his introduction, Stratton clearly lays out the Freudian and Lacanian theories of sexual desire on which his argument is constructed. Using the concepts of penis envy, castration anxiety, the state as phallus, and later, the even more arcane *vagina dentata*, Stratton posits that, culturally, the male’s feelings of inadequacy in the shadow of the all-powerful state are projected onto the female body, which he then constructs into the “key phallic fetish.” It is, in essence, this need to alleviate anxiety about what man lacks that determines what he constructs as desirable. The cultural result is a modern concept of female beauty defined by phallic insecurity and narcissistic reflection rather than by difference and/or Otherness. According to Stratton, the perfect conditions for the growth of this cultural fetishism converged during the mid-nineteenth century, a time of mushrooming commodities linked to social exchange rather than labor, and a new emphasis on consumption and its standardization.

In Chapter 1, Stratton provides a historical account of the establishment of cultural fetishism and its relationship to male desire and the experience of the female body. He explores the preoccupation with father–daughter incest during the late 1800s and dates back to the 1850s the beginnings of the male desire for women with masculinized bodies—more slender, less curvy, more phallic—the archetypal prepubescent girl. In Chapters 2–3, Stratton delineates how the cultural fetishism of the female body was greatly facilitated by technologies that nurtured the paraphilic nature of this desire. With the increase in the state’s surveillance of the individual came the consequent male

surveillance of the female body. Again, Stratton makes a point to tie men’s increasing sense of powerlessness to the growth of the cultural fetish. The voyeurism afforded by the new visual media—photography, film, television, and video—and by the emergence of strip clubs resulted in the ultimate spectacularization of the female body, now exposed to the male fetishistic gaze everywhere and at all times.

As Stratton believes that cultural fetishism is an overdetermining structure in society, he believes that male bodies are also being fetishized. In Chapter 4, he investigates the significance of male desire to consume or become the phallus (state) as it relates to male–male desire. Clearly, he does not argue that homosexuality is a product of the Industrial Revolution, but that the category of homosexuality and its binary opposition to heterosexuality is. Stratton then goes on to expose the effects of fetishization on both women and men. From the shift in dominant female body image toward slenderness, to the construction of eating disorders as female illnesses, to the current male preoccupation with the perfect Adonis-like physique that we find on the cover of the new and multiplying men’s magazines, Stratton sees the effects of cultural fetishism as ubiquitous. In a final and natural extension of his argument, Stratton ends his book with a chapter on gynoids—the inanimate and manufactured representation of woman, the mannequin, the blow-up doll, the easily recognizable fetishistic object. If the female body stands for phallus, the gynoid stands for the female body. In Stratton’s postmodern desire dystopia, women have been disembodied.

This book is an entertaining and informative theoretical exploration of the politics of desire and the body. It artfully weaves together the literature of a number of disciplines to provide what feels like a reasonably comprehensive, though not exhaustive, consideration of the issues. Unlike many postmodern arguments, it is clear and does not obfuscate the point with overly dense prose or annoyingly creative uses of punctuation meant to subversively question the authority of knowledge. It does, however, require the reader to buy into theories about the development of sexual desire that have either been discredited in the scientific literature or are simply unverifiable. One is left wondering if Stratton’s main argument could not be more persuasively made by referring to, at least, more parsimonious theories about power and its relationship to desire and sexuality. Even if the nineteenth century provided the perfect socioeconomic ecology for the growth of cultural fetishism, power and inadequacy likely dictated desirability in the preindustrial past also. That would certainly be consistent with the universality espoused by psychoanalytic concepts of sexual development.

Freudian and neo-Freudian theories clearly continue to thrive in cultural and literary studies, despite their much diminished status in mainstream psychology. Furthermore, their use therein does not appear to be metaphorical. Penis envy may be an adequate metaphor for powerlessness but invoking it literally, as Stratton does, may detract rather than support what is in this case an interesting and very reasonable thesis about the ways in which a male-dominated, industrialized Western world constructs the desirable. Finally, Stratton denies that cultural fetishism is a male conspiracy against women and apologizes if he has depressed or angered any women readers. Intentions aside, he undoubtedly neglects to attribute to women any agency of note in the construction of desire. Although he is certainly under no scholarly obligation to do so, it seems unlikely that women have played no role at all in a dynamic that requires their participation. A consideration of how women have shaped the construction of desire would surely flesh out this story about bodies.

Genital Cutting and Transnational Sisterhood: Disputing U.S. Polemics. Edited by Stanlie M. James and Claire C. Robertson. University of Illinois Press, Urbana, Illinois, 2002, 169 pp., \$29.95.

*Reviewed by Joseph LoPiccolo, Ph.D.*³

This book contains five chapters covering various aspects of the practice of clitoridectomy and infibulation—procedures involving removal of the female external genitals. This is done in many countries in the North and East of Africa, and in some West African countries. While this practice was once termed “female circumcision,” it is now more commonly called “female genital mutilation.” In the Introduction to this volume, the editors note that choice of terminology is not a small issue. They correctly state that the term “female circumcision” is very misleading, as it draws comparison to the much more minor (and non-damaging) procedure done to males in Western society. However, they also dislike the term “female genital mutilation,” arguing that not all of the types of genital cutting *are* mutilation, which is a difficult position to support. The editors accurately describe the different types of procedures, but do not present much information about the prevalence of the procedures in various cultures. They do mention on page 8 that infibulation—“the most drastic type of female genital cutting”—is almost universal in many of the countries of the Horn of Africa (Ethiopia, Sudan, Egypt, Eritrea, and Somalia) and also occurs in

some West African countries. Infibulation removes the entire external genitalia (clitoris, labia majora, and minora), and sews the vagina nearly shut, leaving only a small opening for passage of urine and menstrual fluid. A less severe version of genital cutting, removal of all or part of the clitoris, is common in a *ban* across Central Africa, ranging from Senegal to Kenya and Tanzania. Less drastic versions involving only a cut or puncture of the clitoris also occur. The age at which this procedure is done varies from early childhood to pubescence, where it may be part of initiation into status as an adult woman.

The themes that appear in the various chapters of this book first surface in the Introduction, written by the editors, and in the Prologue, which is the “Position Paper on Clitoridectomy and Infibulation,” by the Women’s Caucus of the African Studies Association. Both take a stand against these practices, but then essentially argue that we in the West overreact to the procedure, in a manner that is simplistic, unfair, and perpetuates a colonialist view of Africans as barbaric and uncivilized (see also Leonard, 2000). It is suggested that Western practices of male circumcision, Caesarian delivery, tubal ligation, hysterectomy, and radical mastectomy disqualify Western cultures from attending to other groups’ customs. This comparison is rather forced and artificial—these practices do not result in the damage or destruction of sexual functioning.

It is further argued that Western cultures practiced clitoridectomy as a cure for masturbation and nymphomania “in the recent past,” which suggests an unconventional view of the meaning of “recent.” The argument is also made that concern about clitoridectomy and infibulation is “a luxury that only the West can afford.” This refers to a lack of Western attention to African women’s needs for food, water, health care, income, etc. While this may be true, there would seem to be a point to be made that solving these problems would require *creating* new entities that entail major real costs and allocation of assets as compared to just stopping something that isn’t required for health and welfare, and actually damages women. Very little mention is made of the large number of children and adolescents who suffer major infection, and even die from these procedures; and little to no mention is made of the sexual effects in the chapters of this book. However, the preliminary portions of the book do make the excellent point that if these procedures are to be eliminated, it will require leadership and action from members of these cultures; that attempts to impose from the “outside,” without taking into account the complexities of race relations and national identities, have not and will not be effective.

Chapter 1 by Walley is titled “Searching for Voices: Feminism, Anthropology, and the Global Debate over Female Genital Operations.” Walley makes the good point

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that immigration, tourism, and refugees have broken down the simple division between “Western” and “African” culture. She notes that immigrant women who perform the procedure on their children have been legally prosecuted for child abuse in a number of countries, but that others have illegally immigrated to Western nations to avoid forced genital cutting procedures. She argues for something of an anthropological cultural relativism view, and suggests that Western attention to the procedure is at least partially based on sensationalization, titillation, and reaffirming Western superiority. This chapter does contain some insightful material from the author’s work with school children in Kenya, who are aware that the ultimate purpose of the procedure is to inhibit female sexuality; but who also value the procedure as “our custom.” However, it is difficult to accept her assertion that Western concern reflects using science to continue “the historical preoccupation with the genitalia and sexuality of African women” (p. 37).

Chapter 2 by Robertson is titled “Getting beyond the Ew! Factor: Rethinking U. S. Approaches to African Female Genital Cutting.” She suggests that giving detailed information (and pictures) of the most extreme procedures to the American public (such as college students) only reinforces a negative view of all African women and cultures, and hinders efforts to stop the procedures, as African women are offended by the suggestion that they need lessons in how to become civilized. Robertson also finds it difficult to accept “conservative politicians” making the procedures illegal here in the United States while not voting for equal rights amendments, and not outlawing breast implants, tattoos, genital piercing, male circumcision, and sex change surgery. She does not acknowledge that the effects of these procedures are rather different from the damage done by female genital cutting procedures and the relevance of this line of argument seems a bit forced. She further argues that African women cope rather well with this procedure and that their lives are not destroyed, as Western media would suggest. She does not deal with the fact that sexual functioning is (depending on the severity of the procedure) damaged or destroyed—this does not seem to be important. There is much discussion of how the media depict African women as evil, barbaric, or powerless victims, rather than as participants in an integral part of their culture. This would suggest that the procedure itself is not intrinsically harmful to women, which certainly is not the case, as will be discussed below.

Chapter 3 by James is titled “Listening to Other(ed) Voices: Reflections around Female Genital Cutting” and continues the themes raised thus far. James objects to media depictions of the procedures (particularly Alice Walker’s notable films and writings), primarily on the

grounds that the pain and damage of the procedures is shown accurately. Failing to recognize the positive value of the procedures is seen as “arrogant perception,” which is “supportive of colonialism” (p. 89). However, this chapter does acknowledge that the basis for the procedures is the control of women’s sexuality, and that the procedure does succeed in this aim. The chapter also briefly describes some educational (not legal) efforts to eliminate the practice, done by locals, which have had some success. In a remarkable apparent contradiction, the author states that no formal declaration has specified the right to have the procedure performed, but then notes that both the World Health Organization and the Inter-African Committee on Traditional Practices Affecting the Health of Women and Children have done so. Additionally, the book contains an Appendix titled “Advocacy Organizations Opposed to Female Genital Cutting,” which lists more than a dozen such organizations, which makes it difficult to understand how it can be argued that no formal declarations on this issue exist.

Chapter 4 by Gunning is titled “Female Genital Surgeries: Eradication Measures at the Western Local Level—A Cautionary Tale.” This chapter argues that the laws against performing these procedures in the United States are wrong, in that the cultural values of the women were not considered. This chapter is rather weakly argued. For example, the fact that children born in the United States are U.S. citizens is never mentioned; rather, it is proposed that U.S. and state laws should ignore the damage done to children by these procedures, out of cultural respect for the origins of the parents. The author is particularly disturbed that she was not consulted in the drafting of these laws. She argues that the laws ignore the “real” needs of minority women and are passed by conservative politicians who ignore these expensive needs, in favor of criminalizing women instead. Gunning asks why male circumcision is not similarly outlawed, again ignoring the difference in the effects of the procedures. The major worthwhile point made in this chapter is the notion that educational efforts, rather than criminal law, would seem to offer the best chance of stopping this procedure.

Chapter 5, titled “Cultural Practice or Reconstructive Surgery? U. S. Genital Cutting, the Intersex Movement, and Medical Double Standards,” is particularly problematic. It is written by Chase, who is the founder and director of the Intersex Society of North America. This organization opposes the surgery that is done for female children born with enlarged external genitals (such as occurs in congenital adrenal hyperplasia). Chase argues that such surgery is unnecessary, is very harmful to the sexuality of these women, and that we should accept intersexuality

rather than damaging women by unnecessary genital surgery. She is very self-disclosing in how damaging clitoral reduction surgery has been for her. Yet, somehow this leads her to conclude that opposition to female genital cutting is a misplaced concern. The view presented as representative of modern thinking about the formation of gender identity, as well as of effects of fetal exposure to masculinizing hormones, contains a number of errors. It is not clear that the issue of treatment of masculinizing conditions actually has a bearing on the practice of female genital cutting.

Overall, then, this book is something of a mixed bag. It does provide a good discussion of the practices involved in female genital cutting and presents a careful discussion of the cultural issues involved in these procedures. However, as noted above, the damage done to sexual functioning is not really acknowledged, and instead there is a focus on why we should not take a judgmental position on this issue. The excellent point is made that efforts to stop the practice must depend on the local cultures involved, rather than being imposed from outside. Yet, the same respect for Western law and custom is not expected of immigrants. Furthermore, it is repeatedly stated that Western opposition is rooted in colonialism, ethnic superiority views of Africans, and displaces concern that should be directed at other issues. The authors do not seem to acknowledge the real damage done by the procedures or to value sexuality very much.

As a clinical psychologist who specializes in sexual problems, I have seen several women who had genital cutting procedures done to them, in their home countries, before coming to the United States. None of these women were able to experience much sexual arousal and none were able to experience orgasm. Some of them were quite disturbed by this loss, but others only sought therapy for unconsummated marriage; due to the vaginismus that resulted from the trauma of clitoridectomy and infibulation. Concern for these women seen by Western clinicians does not reflect colonialism, but rather simple concern for the welfare and quality of life of another human being, which the authors of these papers cannot seem to accept.

Perhaps the greatest lack in this volume is the absence of any specific plan for how individuals and organizations who oppose these procedures could work with the residents of the countries where they occur. The excellent point is made that purely "outside" interventions, no matter how well intentioned, will fail, but no real action plan is offered. Instead, the chapters attempt to minimize the effects of these practices on women's sexuality or to disarm Western concern about them by drawing dubious comparisons to Western medical procedures. More balanced presentations of the issues involved in this emotionally loaded

issue can be found in Francoeur and Taverner (1998) and in Whitehorn, Ayonrinde, and Maingay (2002).

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Racism, Gender Identities and Young Children: Social Relations in a Multi-Ethnic, Inner-City Primary School. By Paul Connolly. Routledge, London, 1998, 214 pp., £13.99.

*Reviewed by Tarja Raag, Ph.D.*⁴

This volume provides a carefully detailed and contextualized chronicle of the self-reported experiences of a small group of preschool-aged children negotiating the complexities of identity development in a multiethnic, inner-city primary school in England. In this work, Connolly responds to a void in this area of study. He notes that work in this area often entirely ignores young children's subjective experiences or merely includes observational studies of children's experiences that avoid detailed interviews of children. Rather than assuming that young children are not competent to understand and represent their own social worlds and not able to participate in interviews, Connolly directly engaged children in dialogue, foregrounding their perspectives and their active roles in identity development.

In highlighting these children's social competencies, Connolly demonstrated that the children are experts in claiming, using, negotiating, reworking, and even resisting pervasive discourses on race and gender. The work demonstrates not only the complexity of children's developing identities, but also illustrates the contradictory, fluid, and context-specific nature of racism and sexism and the multidirectional relationships between developing identities and discourses on race and gender in communities, cultures, politics, and history.

Connolly points out some possible problems with traditional work in this area (including a simplistic understanding of racism in children's lives, unquestioned assumptions about the need to find human universals, and, as already mentioned, avoidance of direct engagement of

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young children in studying children's experiences). Rather than simply acknowledging the need for more work that foregrounds children's own perspectives and contextualizes human experiences, Connolly has designed a study to address these issues. To support his interpretations of these children's experiences, Connolly then provides detailed examples of conversations with the children and assesses their experiences within many different contexts, providing detailed examples of conversations with parents and teachers, and extensive information on local and national educational policy, and political and historical environments.

I found this book to have three additional strengths. First, Connolly makes clear that he values thinking about the application of research/theory in his discussions of the impact of multicultural and antiracist educational practices. Specifically, he suggests that (and demonstrates how) even well-intended programming that is not sufficiently comprehensive has the potential to be at best an ineffective exercise and at worst a way to reinforce racist ideologies. A second additional strength, toward the goal of using of this work in both research and application, is that Connolly carefully considers limits of the extent to which his findings can be generalized, clearly highlighting that this does not represent children beyond those in the study. Connolly is particularly careful to point out the places where he was unable to include all relevant information or where he had access to limited numbers of perspectives. Yet these cautions, relevant to many research projects and methods, neither detract from the value of this work nor from the value/contributions of ethnographic work more generally. In fact, Connolly not only demonstrates how ethnographic work is necessary, but provides evidence of the value of synthesizing diverse methodological approaches to ethnic and gender studies. A final strength of the text is that Connolly integrates the notions of discourse (from the work of Foucault) and habitus, field, and capital (from the work of Bourdieu) into his methods as research tools. His effective application of the notions of habitus, field, and capital were particularly valuable contributions.

Connolly's book is an excellent resource for rethinking research approaches to studying children, reevaluating theories of children's experiences of racism, revising multicultural and antiracist programming in schools, and moving forward into new research inquiries, four primary themes highlighted in the book. I found this text to be a valuable contribution to the literatures and thinking on ethnicity and gender.

Conceiving Sexuality: Approaches to Sex Research in a Postmodern World. Edited by Richard G. Parker

and John H. Gagnon. Routledge, New York, 1995, 307 pp., \$25.99.

*Reviewed by Andreas G. Philaretou, Ph.D.*⁵

Contemporary men tend to be quite ambivalent, confused, and anxious when it comes to thinking about, discussing, or practicing their sexuality in the context of a loving intimate relationship. They seem to be walking a thin line between essentialism and postmodernism (Zilbergeld, 1992). Parker and Gagnon's edited volume constitutes a concise and easy-to-follow examination of the historical, social, and cultural determinants of human sexuality within the contexts of essentialist and postmodern paradigms. Their book is long overdue considering the enormity of today's ambivalence regarding the "male gender role."

In Chapter 1, Lützen suggests that historically, male essentialist ideology has been socially constructed as an immutable biologically ordained entity. This erroneous assumption, Lützen contends, has been misleading sex research for the past couple of centuries by treating male heterosexuality as inherently natural, biologically determined, and heavenly ordained; male biology has been viewed and, to a certain extent, is still considered as sexual destiny. In their introduction, however, Parker and Gagnon suggest that postmodern social constructionist conceptions move away from the limiting modernist assumptions of male essentialist heterosexual ideology. As they point out, social constructionist notions constitute a more humanistic way of approaching issues related to sexuality and gender because they consider the sexual actions of specific bodies within the greater historical, social, and cultural contextual forces in which they occur. Such forces create particular kinds of environments that, in turn, socially condition and direct individuals to certain kinds of sexual, ethical, moral, political, and economic actions.

Throughout the book, the contributors adopt a social constructionist viewpoint in their attempt to place the sociocultural evolution of masculinity within a historical, social, and cultural framework. They come to define masculinity as an ever-present, powerful social force, which is socially constructed by the cultural milieu, communicated by the mass media, and instilled in the members of society through a variety of socialization processes. In turn, social actors come to reformulate and custom-tailor the socioculturally generated masculine meanings

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and experience them in a variety of unique interpersonal and intrapersonal ways. As Weeks points out in Chapter 2, such historico-sociocultural masculine meanings act as powerful overarching determinants or macrolevel blueprints that determine a person's sexual scripting and ultimately help shape the mental, emotional, and interpersonal aspects or microlevel constituencies of his or her sexuality. Sexual scripting refers to the various macrosocietal, mesocultural, and micro-interpersonal and intrapersonal processes (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) involved in instilling the individual with the socioculturally approved and widely accepted sexual norms, values, attitudes, and beliefs that are prevalent at a specific historical time. In addition, it refers to the modeling—through social learning and identification processes—of appropriate sexual behaviors that could be easily and readily emulated by the person (Bandura, 1971).

Upon deconstructing traditional notions of male sexuality—which have viewed it as an inherently universal, heterosexual, natural, and automatic desire—a number of questions usually arise. Parker and Gagnon pose the following questions: “How is [male] sexuality in general, and sexual desire in particular, affected by greater social and economic inequality? How is this desire dissipated and crystallized through the channels of inequality?” (p. 127). Gender inequality has a lot to do with power dynamics and is closely associated with economic inequality, revolving around unequal access to the means of economic production (Lipman-Blumen, 1984). The inextricable linkages between gender and economic inequalities constitute the main social factors responsible for the social construction of a biased male sexual identity and the generation of limiting and anxiety-producing male sexual behaviors.

Lützen and Weeks suggest that throughout the history of human civilization, cultural values, norms, rules, attitudes, beliefs, ideologies, and behaviors have been developed, passed on, and altered, giving rise to various dominant masculine meaning contexts within which most sexual practices occur. As they so poignantly point out, human sexual behavior acquires meaning and essence only within such masculine contexts, which are in turn embedded within larger patriarchal social, cultural, and economic arrangements constantly transformed through time. They go on to explain that the evolution of heterosexual ideology is tightly interwoven with the social construction of masculinity, which, in turn, results from the social and cultural evolution of norms, roles, rules, and practices. Such sociocultural evolution has led to the social construction of a differentiated set of gender roles with masculine roles cherished and revered at the expense of feminine roles (White, 1993). Therefore, complex rela-

tions between meaning and power in the construction of male sexual experience have become solidified through time, and across various societies and cultures, giving rise to predominant masculine contexts. Such masculine meaning contexts have overtly and covertly promoted and maintained power differentials among competing groups, with the most powerful imposing their value meanings and ideologies in all areas of human behavior, including sexuality.

In Chapter 9, de Zalduondo and Bernard attribute the social construction of differential and preferential gender role identities to the patriarchal structuring of economic and power relations. They proceed to explain how such structuring comes to initiate and perpetuate the sexual economic exchanging between men and women. In Chapter 8, Lancaster also points out that the affordance of privileges to a selected male elite has been predicated upon the domination and subordination of working men and women using sexuality as the major vehicle. For this reason, restricted, or missionary style, heterosexuality constituted the norm and advocated as the preferred and “normal” sexual style. Such style was elevated to the status of an absolute, divine, and transcendental law of nature at the expense of other sexual practices and orientations. Therefore, the origin and perpetuation of core societal institutions rests upon the exercise of power and dominance for the sake of elitism. Such elitism has, as its main focus, been the unequal distribution of goods and services and, subsequently, the benefitting of the few and underbenefitting of the many (Kellner, 1989). Under these circumstances, restricted male heterosexual behavior has come to provide a viable avenue for the exercise of domination, subordination, oppression, and, ultimately, for the exploitation of other marginalized groups, such as women, gays and lesbians, and minorities.

In Chapter 7, Heise points out that men act toward their physical, emotional, and psychological needs not blindly but on the basis of personalized masculine meanings that are socially constructed and privately defined throughout their lifelong process of socialization, especially during childhood. These subjective masculine meanings arise primarily from the numerous everyday processes of interpersonal interaction between men and their significant others. Such meanings are subsequently filtered and modified through numerous interpretive processes used by men depending on their physical, emotional, and psychological needs (Bruner, 1990). She goes on to explain how, cross-culturally, masculine meaning contexts come to contribute to the social construction of a violent and predatory male sexuality.

Heise suggests that it is male conditioning and not the condition of being male that appears to be the problem.

The process of attaining manhood is not an easy one because manhood is such an unattainable standard, full of ambiguities, misunderstandings, contradictions, and disappointments. The ideology of manhood induces men with a host of uncomfortable, unpleasant, risky, and even dangerous feelings, ranging from psychological deprivation to personal inadequacy, depression, sexual anxiety, generalized aggression, and sexual addiction. Because the gendering of maleness is socially constructed, it must be continually actualized and reaffirmed through action and sensation—by doing things that repeatedly affirm that one is really male whereas avoiding things that leave room for doubt. This incessant preoccupation with proving one's maleness tends to weaken and brutalize most men, leaving them emotionally empty and confused.

In many cultures, the attainment of manhood is considered to be the most important developmental transition and, for this reason, many societies around the world have developed elaborate rituals and rites of passage to signify the indoctrination of young boys into the esteemed stage of manhood. Even though the particulars of every culture's ritualization process of manhood vary, common underlying determinants include the testing of the boy's courage, physical and mental endurance, aptitude, and skill. They all share the underlying premise that real men are made, not born. This premise regarding the achieved nature of masculinity tends to generate considerable insecurity for most young men because they are continually pressured to yield to it in their school, work, recreational, as well as relational lives. Such pressures are exerted both directly, by the young men's circle of significant others, and indirectly, by their surrounding historico-sociocultural environment advocating masculinity as the ultimate ideal to be attained at all costs, pains, and sacrifices.

Heise and Lancaster point out that attaining the highly unrealistic and idealized masculine standards set by many societies around the world involves extraordinary effort and sacrifice and tends to take a considerable toll on a man's emotional and psychological tranquillity. They go on to explain how soon after young boys successfully complete the various rites of passage imposed on them—and become transformed into masculinized males—they start to face a variety of problems due to the emotionally constricted nature of the masculine standard. They soon come to realize that the popularity, glamour, and power of the masculine world has a considerable price attached to it. As most adult men very well know, becoming emasculated marks the beginning of a great deal of emotional pain, frustration, and humiliation and possibly the development, at varying degrees, of sexual anxiety and addictions of all kinds.

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The Joy of Self-Pleasuring: Why Feel Guilty About Feeling Good? By Edward L. Rowan. Prometheus Books, Amherst, New York, 2000, 226 pp., \$17.00.

Reviewed by Janet T. Canino, M.Sc.⁶

Despite the efforts of pop culture, via television and magazines, to bombard us with thoughts of sexuality, sex remains a difficult subject for many adults to discuss. Masturbation, in particular, seems to be taboo, since there are still many negative connotations surrounding it. With 30 years of experience as a sex therapist, Rowan brings the discussion of masturbation out of the privacy of the bedroom and makes it acceptable to talk about around the dinner table.

The book's 13 chapters cover a wide-range of information, from physiological facts to religion's influence on sexuality. For example, Rowan gives a clear explanation of the sexual response cycle in Chapter 2. Chapter 4 mentions Masters and Johnson, Kinsey, and the Shere Hite report, along with Morton Hunt's study and The National Health and Social Life Survey, as they relate to masturbation and other relevant sexual information. The association of masturbation with sin and sickness is explored in Chapters 6 and 7. Chapter 9 is devoted to the relationship between masturbation and fantasy and Chapter 12 includes a set of exercises to encourage people to move away from thinking about masturbation in terms of guilt and to focus instead on the pleasure and sensuality.

The primary strength I see in this book is how it invites people to take a positive view of self-pleasuring. One way Rowan does this is through his description of the etiology surrounding many of the myths about masturbation. Additionally, case examples involving a variety of

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experiences with masturbation are provided, so that most people are able to find some vignettes that are relevant to them and to their experiences.

Another strength that was refreshing to encounter was the amount of reassurance Rowan provides about the different feelings and anxieties surrounding sexual experiences. For example, when talking about erectile dysfunction, Rowan does a wonderful job of normalizing the experience by saying, "This happens to most men at some time in their lives and there is usually a perfectly good reason for it" (p. 179). Additionally, Rowan stresses the importance of talking with one's partner about sexual beliefs and preferences within the context of the relationship. More specifically, Rowan does an excellent job of talking about how masturbation can fit into the marital relationship. He points out that many married people still masturbate and that this is a normal occurrence. Sometimes, however, partners may see it as a threat to partnered sex. Rowan, again, normalizes this situation for both people and reemphasizes the need for the partners to have an

open conversation about their sexual expectations. Finally, Rowan includes some Internet sites that provide "positive, factual information" (p. 225) as well some humorous sites about masturbation.

As a result of these strengths, I believe this book is a great resource for marriage and family therapists to explore their own feelings about masturbation, since their feelings affect how they talk (or do *not* talk) about this subject with their clients. Clients, moreover, are likely to find this book informative and thought provoking. I could also envision this as an engaging textbook for a graduate class on human sexuality or sex therapy.

My primary concern about the book is that the direct nature of the language and a few of the vignettes might be considered objectionable by some readers. In addition, there were some instances where the explanations or examples given appeared repetitive in nature. Overall, this book is innovative in its approach and comprehensiveness about masturbation and is a valuable and much needed addition to the sexuality literature.